

Appendix A

History of Park and Open Space Planning in Washington County and Park and Trail System Improvements

A Regional Park and Open Space Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin: 2000 (November 1977)

A park and open space plan for Washington County was included as part of the first regional park and open space plan. The plan is documented as SEWRPC Planning Report No. 27, *A Regional Park and Open Space Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin: 2000*, November 1977, and was adopted by the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) on December 1, 1977.

That plan identified existing and probable future park and open space needs within the Region and recommended a park system consisting of large resource-oriented parks and smaller nonresource-oriented urban parks, together with attendant recreational facilities. The regional park and open space plan also recommended the development of an approximately 440-mile network of hiking and bicycling trails within natural resource corridors of regional significance, including corridors along the Lake Michigan shoreline, through the Kettle Moraine, and along the riverine areas of the major streams and watercourses of the Region. The regional park and open space plan incorporated the regional land use plan recommendations concerning primary environmental corridors and farmland preservation.

A Park and Open Space Plan for Washington County (March 1989)

In 1984, the Washington County Park and Planning Commission requested that SEWRPC assist the County in refining and updating the regional park and open space plan as it applied to Washington County. The resulting plan is documented in the first edition of this report, SEWRPC Community Assistance Planning Report No. 136, *A Park and Open Space Plan for Washington County*, March 1989. The plan, which has a design year of 2000, was adopted by the Washington County Board of Supervisors on December 12, 1989, and by SEWRPC on March 7, 1990.

A Park and Open Space Plan for Washington County (August 1997)

In 1994, Washington County requested that SEWRPC prepare a new park and open space plan to refine and update information from the first edition of the Washington County park and open space plan. The resulting plan is documented in the second edition of this report, SEWRPC Community Assistance Planning Report No. 136, *A Park and Open Space Plan for Washington County*, August 1997. The plan, which has a design year of 2010, was adopted by the Washington County Board of Supervisors on August 12, 1997, and by SEWRPC on March 4, 1998.

A Park and Open Space Plan for Washington County (March 2004)

On June 19, 2001, Washington County requested that SEWRPC assist the County in the preparation of an update to the Washington County park and open space plan. The resulting plan is documented in the third edition of SEWRPC Community Assistance Planning Report No. 136, *A Park and Open Space Plan for Washington County*, March 2004. The plan, which has a design year of 2020, was adopted by the Washington County Board of Supervisors on March 9, 2004, and by SEWRPC on June 16, 2004.

The 2004 County park and open space plan recommended that a total of 77,334 acres, or about 28 percent of Washington County, be protected through a combination of public or nonprofit conservation organization ownership, or through the application of protective zoning. These 77,334 acres included planned primary and secondary environmental corridors, planned isolated natural resource areas, and areas outside corridors but within the Department of Natural Resources project boundaries. All natural areas and critical species habitat sites recommended to be preserved were contained within the planned primary or secondary environmental corridors or the planned isolated natural resource areas.

Of the total 77,334 acres of recommended open space lands, 17,758 acres, or about 23 percent, were in public ownership, nonprofit conservation organization ownership, conservation easements, or in compatible private outdoor recreation use in 2002; and were recommended to be preserved in such ownership. It was recommended that an additional 16,228 acres, or about 21 percent of proposed open space lands, be acquired by public agencies for natural resource protection or open space preservation purposes or for public park or trail use. The remaining 43,348 acres of open space lands were to be placed in protective zoning districts to prevent incompatible development. Such protective zoning districts included floodland and lowland and upland conservancy zoning. Upland conservancy zoning was to limit residential development to an overall density of no more than one dwelling unit per five acres, in areas outside steep slopes.

The plan recommended that existing prime agricultural lands be protected by Washington County and local units of government. Specifically, the plan recommended that all prime agricultural lands identified in the farmland preservation plan for Washington County be preserved insofar as practicable in agricultural use.

The plan called for the provision of three new major parks, for a total of 12 major parks within the County. The plan recommended that existing major parks be maintained and improved. It was recommended that five of the existing major County parks be expanded to include adjacent lands with important natural resource values. Additional facilities were also recommended to be developed at all seven existing major County parks.

In addition to maintaining and improving the seven existing major County parks, the 2004 park and open space plan recommended that Washington County would be responsible for acquiring

and developing three new major parks. The three proposed major County parks included: a park in the northwestern portion of the County; a park in the northern portion of the Village of Germantown; and a park in the southwestern portion of the County. The County would also provide two new smaller parks, one to the west of the Village of Jackson on Tilly Lake and one on Big Cedar Lake, and a dog park to serve residents in the central portion of the County.

The plan also recommended that 52 miles of recreational trails be provided within the County. About 12 miles were to be provided by Washington County, and about three miles (including two existing miles) by the City of West Bend, as part of the Milwaukee River Corridor.

The plan also recommended the development of boat access points on major lakes in accordance with State policy to provide public motor boat access to lakes of 50 acres or more. Under the plan, it was recommended that public boat access sites be expanded or acquired and developed as appropriate by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources on the following lakes: Bark Lake, Barton Pond, Lake Five, Friess Lake, Green Lake, Lucas Lake, Silver Lake, Smith Lake, Lake Twelve, and Wallace Lake.

Park and Trail System Improvements (since 2004)

Park and Trail System Operational Changes (since 2004)

Several operational changes have impacted the operation of the Park and Trail System since 2004. When the County passed the \$.005 sales tax in 1999, one of the stated purposes of the tax was park acquisition and development. From that time until roughly 2005, many park projects outlined below saw funds allocated from the sales tax and State and Federal grants to support them. In 2005, a requirement was added that at least 40% of the county sales tax funding would directly offset the levy (be applied to the County's general operating fund) and no more than 60% would be applied to Capital Improvement Projects. In 2010, the purpose of the money was broadened to include economic development. By 2017, County funding allocated for park improvement projects had almost completely seized.

In 2017, The Washington County Public Works Committee directed Parks to move forward with a proposal for a park user fee and a preparation of a work plan ["Washington County Parks Fiscal Sustainability Plan"] that would assist with the funding and investment in the County's existing parks. The goals of this initiative, consistent with the County's Strategic Plan, are to make the County Parks System independent of the property tax levy, "Offer access to unique amenities and natural resources", and "Foster fiscal responsibility, sustainable services, operational excellence, trust and transparency by ensuring accountability, integrity, efficiency and innovation", and align more appropriately with the County's Results, such as "provides an interconnected system of safe trails and paths that enhance the mobility of the community."

The most notable action resulting from this discussion was the introduction of park entrance fees. In 2018, fees were implemented at six of the County's designated higher priority parks in order to generate revenue to help maintain and improve the quality of the parks. Kiosks with new signage

explaining the park attendee's options on how to pay for their park visit (within 7 days of visiting) were installed along with license plate reading cameras at each of the kiosks. The cameras record all cars that enter the park providing sophisticated tracking and comparisons to payments received. The new fees paired with other initiatives within the parks have assisted in creating a new enterprise with hopes to fund parks in perpetuity.

At the same time, changing technology has had a major impact on the County's park and trail system. In 2016, the County launched a new website allowing parks to conduct the majority of its business using an online platform for online reservations and facility rentals. This platform was later expanded to include the purchase of daily and annual user fees as discussed above.

Physical Park and Trail System Improvements (since 2004)

Numerous physical park and trail improvements have been completed since 2004 including the painting of the interior and exterior of all park structures and changing building color with the exceptions of Sandy Knoll and Glacier Hills County Parks. New wayfaring/directional signs were installed throughout the parks in 2018 along with an LED lighting retrofit/upgrade of all exterior light fixtures throughout the parks.

Major projects include construction of a 30' by 30' shelter, a 30' by 60' shelter, a sand volleyball court, and a paved ADA accessible walkway at **Ackerman's Grove County Park**. One shelter is currently being converted into a Vacation Rental by Owner (VRBO) and will be ready to rent in 2020.

Bike and pedestrian transportation was improved in Washington County since 2004 with the development of the **Eisenbahn State Trail**. The trail extends from the Village of Eden in Fond du Lac County to Rusco Drive on the south side of the City of West Bend totaling 24 miles, 12 within Washington County. The rail corridor was abandoned by Fox Valley & Western Ltd. in 1999 and is owned by the State of Wisconsin under a federal program which "banks" or preserves the corridor for potential future rail use, but currently allows the corridor to be developed for recreational uses. The segment within Washington County was developed by the County in cooperation with the City of West Bend. The trail was opened to recreational use in April 2006. The trail grade is level and is intended to be an easy ride for bikers of all levels of experience. The trail passes through farmland, industrial and residential areas, and near scenic waterways affording a variety of experiences. Approximately five miles of trail within the City of West Bend have been paved with the remainder of the Washington County segment surfaced with limestone screenings. Bicycling, hiking, dog walking on a leash, and other non-motorized uses are allowed in summer. The section of trail north of Lighthouse Lane is open to snowmobiles and ATVs during the winter when conditions permit. The section south of Lighthouse Lane is open in winter for cross-country skiing, hiking and snowshoeing as long as conditions permit. There is currently no admission charge for use of the trail.

At **Glacier Hills County Park**, a large sled hill was constructed with lights and benches and a new roof was put on the hall. The Glacier Hills ranger house was converted to a VRBO in early 2017. Glacier Hills Hall is newly renovated including an outdoor patio, new flooring, barn doors and restroom facilities. New HVAC was installed in the Hall in 2019. A new ADA accessible ramp, flooring and deck were added to the Glacier Hills Chapel. In the spring of 2019, the four rustic cabins went through varying renovations; i.e. new doors, new windows, updated roofs, and furnished (table & chairs, couches, chairs, fridge, TV, bunk beds). One cabin in particular was completely re-built into an A-frame style on top of an old foundation. All cabins are now open for people to rent for overnight stays. A new well was drilled and new showers were added in the basement of the Hall to accommodate the new cabin rental use.

As recommended in the 2004 County park and open space plan, public boat access is now provided by the County on Silver Lake. **Henschke Hillside Lake Access** is located on the east shore of Silver Lake. The property was partly donated by the late Roland Henschke in 1999 with the intent that it be used to develop public boat access to Silver Lake. A lighted parking lot, a restroom facility, as well as five vehicle-trailer parking spaces and one additional handicapped vehicle-trailer parking space are located on the property on Peters Drive opposite the launch. A new dock will be added to the boat launch in Spring 2020.

Improvements at **Heritage Trails County Park** include the construction of an 18-hole disc golf course, foot golf course, and a new roof was put on the barn.

At **Homestead Hollow County Park**, a soccer complex was completed, dated playground equipment was replaced with new playground equipment, new roofs were put on the barns, a new paved ADA accessible walkway was constructed, and the tennis court and parking lot were reconstructed. A portion of Homestead Hollow County Park in Germantown was transformed into a 10-acre fenced in dog park in the spring of 2018, and opened later that summer. There is the main play area for all, as well as a separate fenced off area for smaller dogs. Benches, dog bag stations & various signs throughout the park display our sponsors that generously donated to help fund the dog park. Currently, the upper barn in Homestead Hollow is being renovated to create a new premier barn event space ready for rentals in May 2020.

Land on Erler Lake was donated in 1999 for the development of **Leonard J. Yahr County Park**. Since 2004, the 38-acre park has been developed and includes playground equipment, restroom facility, swimming beach, fishing pier, and a carry-in boat launch. A farmhouse on the property has been renovated and converted into a VRBO with ADA accessibility. A block house was demolished and replaced with a 30' by 60' shelter along with a paved parking lot and walkway. A gravel parking lot at the park's entrance was paved, the fishing pier was extended by 100 feet, and a five-acre prairie was established.

At **Lizard Mound County Park**, an interpretive center has been constructed and restoration efforts have been conducted to return a portion of the site to its natural state. On February 12, 2020, the Washington County Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution to convey Lizard Mound

County Park, formerly Lizard Mound State Park to the State of Wisconsin for anticipated ownership and continued stewardship by the Milwaukee Audubon Society.

Improvements at **Ridge Run County Park**, which became a City of West Bend park on January 1, 2016, included the construction of the Rettler Family Recreation Area (which includes tennis courts, a basketball court, play and fitness equipment, trees, and a paved walkway), a 30' by 60' shelter, a gravel walkway, new playground equipment, a bathroom facility, a sand volleyball court, and updates to the Bicentennial Arboretum.

Major improvements made to **Sandy Knoll County Park** include installation of new playground equipment on the north end of the park and an upgrading of playground equipment on the south end of the park. Paths to the playgrounds were also constructed for improved handicap accessibility. A basketball court was repaved and a sand volleyball court was installed. Transportation was improved with the widening of roads, replacement of a bridge, and installation of a pedestrian path throughout most of the park. In 2016, the beach and beach access from the parking lot was reconstructed. The Sandy Knoll ranger house was converted into a VRBO. In 2018, an 18-hole disc golf course was installed. The course offers short and long tee off areas with numerous basket locations. Currently, a dog park is under constructed near the entrance of the park that is scheduled to be open in 2020.

Twenty acres in the Town of Jackson were donated to Washington County to be developed as Isadore and Lorraine **Spaeth County Park**. The park opened in 2015 and includes a gravel parking lot, gravel walkway, trees, and a 24' by 28' shelter.

Updates were also made to the Howard Buth Memorial Arboretum at **Washington County Family Park**.

Two new County parks recommended in the 2004 park and open space plan will not be developed. The site of the proposed new major County park in Germantown has been acquired by the MMSD as part of its "Greenseams" program for stormwater management and open space preservation. The proposed County park site near Tilly Lake has been acquired for private development, and no alternative site is available.

Events and Partnerships (since 2004)

A major focus for the County has been on fostering activities and amenities that will attract park users to the parks, creating "destination parks," and on partnering to do this when possible. Partnering with other private and non-profit organizations offsets operational costs, increases capacity of current staff, and results in higher quality parks and park amenities.

The below list summarizes major partnership initiatives:

- Partnered with WI DNR and numerous conservation organizations to host a series of Wild About Parks Events throughout the County Park System. These events included tree climbing, learn to kayak, wetland hikes, star gazing, GPS quest, and Smokey Bear talks around the campfire along with many other conservation based events.
- Partnered with Riverside Disc Golf Pro Shop, which relocated to a shelter in Sandy Knoll County Park in 2018. The shop sells various discs, snacks and other miscellaneous disc golf gear while working to advance the disc golf course and its use.
- Partnered with Waukesha County Parks to offer the “Parks Without Borders” program to the public. On certain weekends throughout of the year (such as Mother’s Day or Father’s Day), both park systems offer free reciprocal park admission to annual park sticker holders from both counties; that comes out to having access to 16 different parks and over 3,500 acres to explore.
- Partnered with Germantown Parks and Recreation to host an annual “Fall Festival” in Homestead Hollow County Park.
- Partnered with Raised Grain Brewery and Black Husky Brewing in 2019 to provide a summer long traveling beer garden series throughout the parks. Local food trucks attended each week with occasional live music acts & activities.
- Partnered with Bilda’s Friess Lake Pub to bring a new once-a-month Thursday night series to Washington County; “Bilda’s Brews, Bands & BBQ” held at Glacier Hills County Park in Richfield. Bilda’s brings various beer & drinks, serves their famous BBQ and books a live music act to complete the night at Glacier Hills.
- Partnered with Bilda’s and Homegrown Music Festival to bring mini music festivals to Glacier Hills and Sandy Knoll County Parks.
- Currently partnering with Tough Mudder to bring an obstacle race to Heritage Trails County Park in June 2020.